

# DISTRICT COUNCIL

## REPORT TO THE 2013 PARISH ANNUAL MEETINGS IN THE CLAYDON & BARHAM WARD

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Your district councillors prepare and present a report to each parish council meeting held during the year but are pleased to also have the opportunity provided by these annual parish meetings to report directly back to the electorate in the Claydon & Barham Ward. The contact details for your district councillors are shown at the end of this report and are also on parish notice-boards and the MSDC website.

### INTEGRATION

Although Mid-Suffolk and Babergh District Councils continue to operate as two separate and sovereign council bodies, both Councils agreed to integrate the staff and services across the two Councils. Last year we reported that the Tier 2 Strategic Directors and Tier 3 Heads of Service had been established. During the first few months of the 2012/13 year, the Tier 4 Corporate Managers were appointed. Management has been reduced to just three layers operating across two councils and numbers cut by over 50%. The result is an annual saving of £1.8 million per year across the two councils – equivalent to 9% of annual revenues.

The fifth and final tier in this flattened organisational structure – not surprisingly called Tier 5 – is the Operational Delivery Teams, or ODTs. This is the final phase of the integration and is still underway. Job descriptions for all these posts have now been prepared and one-to-one discussions as well as group presentations have been held. The final structure was awaiting the setting of the new strategic priorities for the two Councils.

### COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT EXERCISE AND NEW STRATEGIC PRIORITIES

To establish the new strategic priorities, the forty councillors in Mid-Suffolk, with each assigned a council officer/manager, embarked on an extensive Community Engagement exercise with parish councils, local voluntary bodies and other interested parties. This took place between September and December and identified local concerns and priorities as well as updating databases of communal facilities, amenities and voluntary organisations. Unsurprisingly there was a lot of commonality in the concerns and priorities across the 122 Mid Suffolk parishes. These were then discussed and evaluated at member workshops.

The resulting draft strategic priorities were reviewed by the Executive Committee in March and are now being put before Full Council on April 11<sup>th</sup> with a recommendation of approval. The key vision for the Council is “We will work to ensure that the economy, environment and communities of Mid Suffolk continue to thrive and achieve their full potential”. Three strategic priorities that lead from that vision are:-

- (a) Lead and shape the local economy by promoting and helping to deliver sustained economic growth which is balanced with respect for wildlife, heritage and the natural and built environment
- (b) Ensure that there are enough good quality, environmentally efficient and cost effective homes with appropriate tenures and in the right location.
- (c) Encourage and support individuals and communities to be self sufficient, strong, healthy and safe.

The Council's Strategic Directors, together with managers and staff have developed from these a set of outcomes. We will not list all these for you here as there are eighteen in total but together these provide the basis for Mid Suffolk's Strategic Plan and the development of the Organisational Delivery Teams to deliver it.

## **WASTE COLLECTION AND RECYCLING**

Key points to note for 2012/13 are the roll out of the textile recycling scheme which by the end of December had collected 400 tonnes of textiles which might otherwise have gone to landfill. There are now nearly 8,800 subscribers to the Garden Waste Collection Scheme (aka Brown Bins). At the February Full Council meeting, the portfolio holder with responsibility for waste collection apologised to members for the problems encountered in January. Collections in that period fell well below the high standards expected, and normally delivered in Mid Suffolk, due not only to the bad weather but also vehicle breakdowns, accidents, sickness and crew injuries. We were assured that, in review with Serco, major lessons have been learnt for the future.

## **HOUSING**

As at 31<sup>st</sup> December there were no non-decent properties in the MSDC housing stock –work on the last few houses being completed prior to Christmas. This follows a major exercise carried out over recent years to upgrade domestic properties in the Council's ownership.

Council house rents will increase by 4% in April 2013. Both the Tenant's Forum and Joint Housing Board had acknowledged the reasons for the increase but there was some opposition to this increase in Council and it was only passed by 18 votes to 16.

## **WELFARE & BENEFIT CHANGES**

Various welfare and benefit changes come into effect from April 2013 but these have involved a great deal of planning, consultation and communication for the district council during 2012/13 in order to be ready for these changes. The government reduced by 10% its council tax benefit grant but exempted pensioners from the changes. Some working age claimants will find themselves now paying a modest amount of council tax whereas previously they paid nothing. In the case of Mid Suffolk this payment is 5% of a full council tax bill. This will not cover the shortfall in grant and the Council decided to fund this difference by eliminating second home council tax discounts and reducing the void period granted to landlords between lettings. Other developments include reductions in housing benefit payments for council/social housing tenants who have spare bedrooms and a major change to the handling of non-domestic business rates.

## **BUDGET 2013/14**

Mid Suffolk has £1.8million of New Homes Bonus grant held in reserves. This money is not ring-fenced by government and will be available to support the Council's strategic priorities along with £200,000 allocated for funding projects put forward by Town and Parish Councils and Community Groups. Additional New Homes Bonus grants from central government are anticipated over the next few years. It will be interesting to see how the various political groups propose to utilise these funds in the coming years.

The budgeted spend for 2013/14 is virtually unchanged from 2012/13 and the Council accepted the government's council tax freeze grant. Both the Conservatives and Liberal Democrats supported the decision to freeze council tax for another year whilst the Greens, Suffolk Together and Independents Group sought a 1.95% rise. The freeze was ultimately passed by 20 votes to 4 with 10 abstentions.

## **YOUR DISTRICT COUNCILLORS are:-**

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